REPORTING CONGRESS.

HOW IT IS DONE IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA.

The United States Ahead of the World—Uncle Sam Does His Own Reporting, While John Bull Depends Upon Contractors—Official Reporters and Newspaper Reporters—England's Hansard and Our "Congressional Record."

The death of John J. McElhone, for many years the chief official stenographer of the House of Representatives, brings up the subject of Congressional reporting—an interesting and important subject. The art of shorthand writing is not a new one, but its present perfection is an achievement of the present generation. As long ago as 1588—three centuries ago, that is to say—there was in use in England a system of arbitrary characters to represent words. It was invented by a man named Bright. It wasn't much of a system of shorthand, but it is the first recorded invention having fast-writing for its object. A shorthand alphabet—the first—was published by an Englishman named John Willis in 1602. From time to time improvements were made on that alphabet, until in 1837 Isaac Pitman published his phonographic system, based upon the old shorthand alphabet rearranged and improved and upon the principle of spelling every word by sound.

Up till that time the art of shorthand writing had attracted but little attention, and was but little used in America. But since then Americans have made many improvements upon Pitman's system, and there is no doubt that to-day the United States is the foremost shorthand-writing country in the world. It is not to be wondered at that Americans should lead the world in every art that conduces to speed in the despatch of daily business. There is no other government in the world whose transactions are so fully and freely published as are those of the Government of the United States, and there is no other national Legislature on earth whose record is so fully and so thoroughly kept as the Congress of the United States. As an official report of legislative proceedings the *Congressional Record* is without a peer.

The Continental Congress had no record but the journal. No stenographic report of the debates was made. And incidentally it may be remarked that the manuscript journals, scanty as they were, were not faithfully reproduced in the printing. The Secretary of the Continental Congress kept three manuscript journals—a rough and a smooth journal and a secret journal. The rough journal consisted of the rough notes which the Secretary hurriedly jotted down while the business was proceeding. The smooth journal was the copy of the rough journal which the Secretary made out afterward, when he had leisure to pay some attention to neatness of form and to excellence of penmanship. The secret journal was a separate and distinct affair, in which only things of unusual importance were noted. The secret journal was not made public until 1823, when by order of Congress it was printed. The other journals of Congress were printed soon after the occurrence of the events which they recorded. Of the manuscript journals there is no duplicate, and as the original is kept among the archives of the State Department, from which it is not to be removed, it cannot, of course, be circulated among the people for their general inspection and benefit. Even historians who have had occasion to verify facts by reference to the journals of the Continental Congress have been obliged to rest satisfied with reference to the printed journals, never doubting that they were absolutely accurate and true copies of the MS. original. Their confidence, however, has been misplaced. The printed journals of Congress are not true. They are false and misleading in many important points. A careful study of the original manuscripts made recently at the State Department by Mr. Roberdeau Buchanan proves to a demonstration that the signing of the Declaration of Independence is an event not to be assigned to the Fourth of July, (as it usually is and as the printed journals indicate that it ought to be,) but that on the contrary the Declaration of Independence, the sacred and venerable parchment which may be seen by any devotee who takes the trouble to seek it out at the State Department in this city, was not even engrossed until the 2d of August, which is therefore the earliest date upon which any of the immortal fifty-six could have signed it. As a matter of fact Thornton, of New Hampshire, did not sign it until November, 1776, and in January, 1777, the signature of McKean, of Delaware, was still wanting. It is hard to say it, but the venerable parchment itself sins in common with the printed journals. It pretends to be a document made, signed, and in every way completed on the Fourth of July, 1776, which is altogether a false pretense, and the fact that the Declaration was adopted by the Congress on July 4 is no excuse. Not the adoption of the Declaration, but the signing of the document was the solemn and heroic act which gave the Revolution a paternity and a home, and consecrated to the Republic the sacred honor and the lives of the signers.

The entire record of the Congress from September 5, 1774, till the last meeting prior to the assembling of the new Congress under the new Constitution in 1789 is contained in four printed volumes of a size not much larger than the ordinary novel of to-day. The reports of Congress as printed in the *Congressional Record* now would fill that amount of space in a fortnight.

A journal of the House and a journal of the Senate has been kept up from 1789 till the present minute, in continuation of the journals of the Continental Congress. The fullness of the report in the *Congressional Record* of to-day does not interfere with the journal, which continues in the even tenor of its way, regardless of all interlopers. The journal is the official record. It is prepared under the direct supervision of the Senate and House respectively, and by the Senate and House respectively is approved or corrected every morning before the business of the new day is taken up. The journal has an official status and a function which have never been conferred upon the *Congressional Record*, great and voluminous as the latter has become.

The *Congressional Record* is not the successor of the journal kept in the years from 1774 to 1789, but of "The Annals of Congress," "The Register of Debates in Congress," and the *Congressional Globe*. It had no ancestor in the Continental Congress. It was not until Congress met under the new Constitution in 1789 that any attempt was made at reporting the debates. And then it was more a matter of compiling and of bookmaking than reporting. It was simply that some enterprising journalist or literary man thought it would be a good thing to publish a book or something that would give a fuller account of the proceedings of Congress than was given in the journal. The idea occurred to a man named Gales. He made the proposition to Congress, and Congress arranged with him for the publication of the book. Congressmen then were probably just as desirous as they are still to have their speeches printed, and that natural vanity of speech which belongs to most men made it easy for Gales to carry his proposition. But it was simply a compilation, containing some speeches in full and some in condensed form, with other miscellaneous matter to fill up. The first volume of "The Annals of the Congress of the United States" on its title page proclaims itself to be, "The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States," etc., with "Public Documents and Laws of a Public Nature, compiled from authentic materials by Joseph Gales, Sr.," and the book was published in Washington by Gales & Seaton.

The "Annals" continued along until the Eighteenth Congress. Then came "The Register of Debates in Congress," which was simply an extension of the same work on the same plan, but under a new name. The title-page of the first volume shows the character of the work:

"Register of Debates in Congress, presenting the leading Debates and Incidents of the second session of the Eighteenth Congress, together with an Appendix, containing the most important State papers and public documents to which the session has given birth, to which are added the laws enacted during the session, with a copious index to the whole."

The "Register," like the "Annals," was published in Washington by Gales & Seaton.

Then came the *Congressional Globe*. It assumed the size of leaf which is still used in the *Congressional Record*, and in several respects began to look more like a consecutive and regular report than a compilation. But still no attempt was made at a complete shorthand report of the proceedings in Congress. The first volume of the *Congressional Globe* on its title-page only claimed to contain "Sketches of the Debates and Proceedings of the Twenty-third Congress." Like its predecessors, it was a private enterprise, though encouraged and supported by Congress. It was "edited by Blair and Rives," and "printed for the editors" at the *Globe* Office, in Washington.

The *Congressional Globe* ran on as a mere compilation for over twenty years. Then Congress began to think about employing shorthand reporters, and in 1848 an arrangement was made by the Senate with the *National Intelligencer* and *Union* (the two daily newspapers published at the National Capital in the interest of the two political parties respectively) to publish a daily shorthand report of the debates. It is curious that the Senate should have thought it necessary to have two independent reports because there were two political parties. One shorthand corps can be trusted nowadays to report both sides of a debate. This duplex system continued in use two or three years, but in 1851 the contract was taken from the other two newspapers and given to the *Daily Globe*. The Senate and House both arranged about the same time to have a daily shorthand report printed in the *Globe*, and then for the first time each House of Congress had a corps of shorthand reporters engaged in reporting its debates. That is just about forty years ago. Mr. McElhone, who died the other day, was a member of that original House corps, and Denis F. Murphy, who is still at the head of the Senate's corps of shorthand reporters, was one of them then. So that the shorthand reports of the United States Congress are the work of a single generation. During all that time they have been pretty full and pretty accurate. At present they are the fullest reports of the proceedings of a legislative body printed anywhere in the world; and apart from the fact that long, windy speeches that were never delivered at all are printed at length, and that tables of figures and other masses of stuff utterly unfit to be spoken of in debate, are frequently inserted, as "part of the gentleman's remarks," in speeches that otherwise were spoken, and that members in revising the manuscript reports of their speeches, as they frequently do, strike out things they said and put in things they did not say, the *Congressional Record*, in addition to being the fullest, is also the most accurate of all reports of parliamentary bodies. Neither in point of fullness nor accuracy can the report of the British Parliament bear comparison with ours.

Up to the year 1873 the reporting of the Congressional debates was done by contract, and the reporters were employed by the contractors. In 1873 all these contracts were canceled. The reporters were employed directly by the Senate and the House and the *Congressional Record* was established. From the day of its establishment it was printed at the Government Printing Office, as it is now; and the United States Congress has ever since been self-reporting, so to speak.

Murphy, who is employed by the Senate, and four assistants, who are employed by him, receive $25,000 a year for reporting the Senate; and even though out of this sum the hire of amanuensis, (junior stenographers,) type-writers, and graphophones have to be paid, the compensation is liberal, considering that the Senate does not on an average sit more than four or five months a year, and not over four or five hours a day. But the work is exacting and it is well done. The Senate stenographers understand each other's notes so well that they frequently transcribe for each other. Murphy used to take most of the notes himself and have his assistants transcribe them, but he is growing too deaf now for continuous note taking on the floor of the Senate. Anyhow the work is so divided up and managed that generally the type-writers in Murphy's office have the debates on paper, fully written out, and ready for the printer within an hour or so after the words have been delivered in the Senate.

On the House side the method is pretty nearly the same as in the Senate, with this exception, that while the Senate appoints only Murphy himself, leaving it to him to appoint his assistants, the Speaker of the House makes all the appointments to the House reporting corps, which consists of one chief of corps at $6,000 a year, four official stenographers at $5,000 each, and an assistant at $1,000, making $27,000 in all.

The British Parliament is away behind the Congress of the United States in the matter of reporting its own proceedings. The two institutions resemble each other in the fact that from the beginning each has kept a journal. But the British Parliament up to this day makes no shorthand report of its own proceedings. Instead of our *Congressional Record* they have Hansard. Everybody has heard of Hansard, but everybody may not know exactly what the name means. Hansard is now to the British Parliament what Gales was to the American Congress half a century ago. In the matter of having its proceedings reported the English stand now where we stood then. Hansard is a private individual who keeps a printing establishment in London, and who since 1803 has been regularly printing and publishing, under contract with "Her Majesty's government," what he calls "Hansard's Parliamentary Debates." (The one individual Hansard has not lived and worked continuously since 1803, but the job has been in the family all the time.) Even now he does not employ any stenographers of his own to do the work. He waits for the London morning papers and clips the reports of the speeches from them, taking care generally to give members an opportunity to approve or revise their remarks. In England the newspaper reporters do the shorthand work. This partly explains why almost every English newspaper reporter is a shorthand writer, while in America, even in the press galleries of Congress, it is a rare thing to find a newspaper reporter who can write shorthand. If a Washington newspaper correspondent wants the words of a speech which has been delivered in the House or Senate he usually either gets a proof from the member who perhaps has had it printed beforehand, or he gets an advance proof from the *Congressional Record* or from the official reporters. In England the newspapers want extensive shorthand reports and very little else of Parliament, and several English papers, not relying on the daily reports sent out by the Press Associations, employ as many as a dozen shorthand reporters to report the proceedings in the two Houses. As long as this remains so possibly Hansard and the journal will satisfy all official demands. One would think, indeed, that Hansard might be dispensed with, but the English are slow to deprive a family of a Government job they have held so long.

Hansard's "Parliamentary Debates" are in continuation of a work called the "Parliamentary History of England," which, in thirty-six volumes, covers the whole period from the Norman Conquest to the year 1803. They already extend to about six hundred volumes, and they are big ones.

Like nearly all other Government publications, a good round price is charged for Hansard, while the *Congressional Record*, like most other public documents of the United States, goes free.

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Proposals.

PROPOSALS FOR FUEL—OFFICE OF THE Superintendent of the State, War, and Navy Department Building, Washington, D. C., July 1, 1890.—Sealed proposals, in duplicate, inclosed and addressed to the undersigned, will be received at this office until 12 o'clock M. on SATURDAY, July 14, 1890, to supply the State, War, and Navy Department Building with fuel during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1891, as follows: 3,500 tons, extra hard, white ash furnace coal, 25 tons white ash stove coal. All coal must be of the best quality, free from dust or impurities, and inspected by a sworn inspector at the cost of the contractor, and to be weighed upon the Government scales in the court yards. One hundred cords hickory wood, 50 cords spruce pine wood. All wood to be of the best quality and inspected by a sworn inspector at the cost of the contractor; the hickory wood to be sawed in three pieces and measured after it is sawed and delivered. The coal and wood to be delivered at the State, War, and Navy Department Building, and stored in the vaults by the party or parties to whom the contract or contracts may be awarded at such times and in such quantities as the convenience of the office may require, reserving the right to order as much more or as much less of either coal or wood as may be required at the contract price, also the right to reject any and all bids, or to accept any portion of any bid. The successful bidder or bidders will be required to furnish a bond in the sum of $5,000, as a guarantee of the faithful performance of the contract. THOM WILLIAMSON, Chief Engineer, U. S. N., Superintendent. jy6-1t3

PROPOSALS FOR MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS, Office of the Superintendent of the State, War, and Navy Department Building, Washington, D. C., July 1, 1890.—Sealed proposals, in duplicate, will be received at this office until 12 o'clock noon SATURDAY, July 12, 1890, for furnishing this office, during the fiscal year ending June 30, 1891, with Soap, Brushes, Sponge, Paints, Oil, Glass, Towels, Crash, Cocoa Mats, Nails, Screws, etc., etc. Schedules, forms of proposals, and all necessary information can be obtained upon application to THOM WILLIAMSON, Chief Engineer, U. S. N., Superintendent. jy6-1t12